Nature Rx: Community is Natural

Nature Rx—(Re)Connecting Humans with their Native Habitats

Haven Kiers, Special Projects Manager
Stacey Parker, GATEways Horticulturist

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“The world is so empty if one thinks only of mountains, rivers & cities; but to know someone who thinks & feels with us, & who, though distant, is close to us in spirit, this makes the earth for us an inhabited garden.”

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
Why Community?
In speaking to the importance of nature to humans, we must not fail to account for the nature of humans .... that we are social animals.
• Nature is profoundly integral to the human experience
• We evolved in an environment that we no longer live in
• When reconnecting with our natural habitats we must remember that we always did so in groups
Loneliness

- Nearly 50% of Americans are lonely
- 1 in 10 adults reports having no close friends (number has tripled since 1985)
- Affects Gen Z the most (highest score on the loneliness scale - 48.3)
  - Millennials - 45.3
  - Gen X - 45.1
  - Baby-boomers - 42.4
  - Greatest Generation (72+) - 38.6
Loneliness

- Decreases sense of well-being
- Increases fight or flight signaling
- Increases inflammation
- Increases depressive symptoms
- Decreases immune response
- Increases the risk of heart disease by 29%
- Increases the risk of stroke by 32%
- Increases the risk of mortality by 26% (about the same as obesity)
- Amounts to a comparable risk factor as smoking 15 cigarettes/day
“The evidence is out there: people who do ‘green’ volunteer work stay healthier and happier over time than people who do other kinds of volunteer work... One study in Alameda, California, found that retirees who do “environmental” work were half as likely as non-volunteers to show depressive symptoms after twenty years, while people who did other forms of volunteering only had their risk lowered by 10 percent.”

Making the Case: Nature and People

Our purpose - to inspire human potential to help communities and environments thrive
“I think that I benefitted greatly from the tranquil moments of observation and contemplation in between the completion of tasks….I feel that those almost meditative moments of work and observation also allowed me to be a more balanced and dynamic student both inside and outside of the classroom.”

– Waterway Stewardship student intern
Learning by Leading – Environmental Education, Outreach & Lifelong Learning
I was inspired, and frankly, still am. I want to see more, to do more, to feel more of which I know is a deeper connection to this planet. There’s something primal about humans and Earth working—even simply existing, in harmony. Something we’ve lost. This class reminded me of that. There are small things to do to regain that connection."

– Nature Rx Student
Nature Rx Staff and Faculty
Volunteers

Volunteering:

• Instills a sense of purpose
• Develops emotional stability
• Improves depression, PTSD, low self-esteem, OCD
• Fosters connection to others
• Improves social functioning
• Reduces stress
• Improves wellbeing
• Has both individual health benefits as well as social benefits
• Greater functional ability
• Lower rates of depression
• Provides sense of purpose and life satisfaction
Key Elements

• Nature
Key Elements

- Nature
- Meaningful Experiences
Key Elements

• Nature
• Meaningful Experiences
• Reflection
Key Elements

- Nature
- Meaningful Experiences
- Reflection
- Reciprocity
Conclusion

• We are social creatures by nature
• Every member of a group has an essential role to play
• Concept of ‘individuality’ is a modern one
• Humans thrive when part of a community
Thank you!